

Monsters, Unraveling reality.

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ISBN: 978-1-257-00670-0

Printed in the United States of America

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Deep underground, and in the wilderness, lies creatures once only thought to have existed in fairy tales. But they were real, and the world learnt this the hard way. When people stumbled onto them, they were once so peaceful if not afraid. People were curious, as with most animals. They took them and they learnt what they really were. They were just like us, but different. Their organs were like us, but some of them didn't even live at all. Some of them seemed to be alive by magic. Something many didn't believe existed either until now. Science never liked magic but upon seeing these creatures they simply had to settle on being proven foolish. The world deemed magic far too powerful for everyone else to have, so only very specific people had the privilege for magic. As with most creatures, they grew angered to be observed in boxes and tables, so they lashed out. They lashed so much, people had to let them go. Letting them go may have been our fatal mistake. Every society has leaders, we people have presidents and mayors. Monsters had pack leaders, royalty of their own separate races, and high kings that ruled over all other royals and the smaller ones. War began between the two, monsters and humans. Maybe it's a tale used for many other stories, but art imitates life in a repetitive circle. The stories we told to children became real. Our leaders needed an army; something bigger, and meaner than any army that ever fought their own species before. Wars between humans ended, to pull together for the winged beasts and serpents living under their feet. Magic was granted to those specifically, the ones that needed it to fight magic back. And monster hunters were created. The hunters of monsters were separated into categories. Masters whom received the highest information from world leaders, regular hunters, and novices. Subcategories were for the ones specifically bred for magic. They were the wizards you heard in books, they fought monsters not with specialized weapons but with fire power from their own hands. Masters trained everyone under them to be what they strived to be, and worked to control this army as best they could. They chose whom would level their way up the chain with arenas built for the masses to sit around and watch, as humans brutalized the beasts or got brutalized themselves. You'll be put through this place multiple times in your life before you achieve greatness. And many more before you even dream of being a master. Unless you chose to stay where you were on the chain, you'll be doing this often. This is the book for you to know not only this history, but every monster species known to man. Every weakness, every weapon we have, and every tip we could give you to not die. Before any documented monsters, you need to know your weapons and why you have them. Magic is more than a tool people use to slay by hand, admittedly, but it also works with your weapons. Normal guns can kill a man, but can't kill a monster coming at you most times. Ever wondered why we needed silver bullets for werewolves? Well, we need blazing bullets for the hulking ice covered Hercules that would be coming to pound your skull for example. Most of these can be switched between elements, for instance your guns will have buttons or switches to change elements. Bullets filled with electricity, bullets frozen so much a human would have a completely frozen body after one hit despite it being so small, and so on. Swords made like these normally look much different than a regular blade, the blades themselves are more robotic as well. They are sharp, but not so thin. On the insides they're filled with wires and tubes in order to heat them or otherwise, but they are smooth and are still sharp lines that resemble

razors. They can still impale, and upon impalement the results depend on the element your finger has pressed upon holding. As the handle still has those same buttons as the guns. This is consistent. It's easy to learn and pick up your weapons when they all are built in basically the same ways, the only difference is the fighting style.

Many monsters we've uncovered have a particular element tied to nature itself. For instance those made of trees would burn up to fire, and so on. Many undead die the same way one would in the movies. Spiritual monsters need to be purified with holy magic of some sort. It's not much different than what you see on the television. It still, however, shouldn't put in your mind that this will be easy. We are not made to be like them, we are not their size in most cases, we can be crushed and have been crushed very easily. Don't be a fool simply because the explanation to this seems simple.

Beyond this point, there were many sketches of creatures. Some recognizable from fairy tales, some indescribable and complex. All with comprehensive ways as to how to murder or trap them. Their weaknesses and all.

It was very brutal. It was... Surprising as to how some people below the age of ten would read these books in schools now. It was necessary for survival, they would explain. He always found it foolish and possibly traumatic, even.

Illusion was a young man, named according to many hunters in his family. He sounded like one of those Gary Stu, but believe him when he said he hated himself immensely. Mostly because his family regularly reminded him of how terrible of a hunter he was. He was around the age of sixteen now, and he had not passed a novice rank. He had been pushed into those terror shows many times to fight for the enjoyment of many people, but he just couldn't. He couldn't imagine violence the way others could, unless it was his own blood in its place. He was more than tired of his family. Who made him read this book regularly, to the point he could draw these creatures by hand now surely. They equally made him worship gods he had lost faith in long ago.

He closed the book and sighed, looking at the clock. He had been looking at the diagrams for more than three hours now.

It was heavy.. He could barely lift the thing to the shelves.

He could, however, lift a blade. He carried the swords on his back easily. He was going out, even if his family hated when he did so without telling them. He always ended up walking off into the wilderness without consent. He felt... Odd calmness out here. Especially sitting upon the fallen logs for long periods, listening to the wilderness. There had to be a god. It just wasn't the ones he had grown with for sure.

Many of Illusion's worries left his mind when he was left alone. He could be himself, he could be without the books. He could feel the subtle rumbling under his feet.

Rumbling..?

He looked down. The ground beneath him was beginning to crack.

He jumped off of the log moments before a long neck busted up from the dirt. It was what almost looked like a gigantic snake. Scales as heavy and stiff as clay and rock. Something he had not prepared for.

How could you? To his luck, someone else was out here with him. A crimson haired man in full armor bursting from the grass with an ax lit with an orange energy that made it somehow greatly

heavier than it already was. It bashed through the creature's neck and spewed a green liquid onto his own armored face.

Illusion fell to his feet and stood in speechlessness, but he was the happiest kind.

"Leo...?"

Leo, named after the stars he has been born in, was as agile as a feline and had the bite of one as well. He was a perfectionist, and a frustrated one at that. He couldn't fail. If he did, he ate himself up inside for it to near death. The one thing keeping him from being the rank of a master was simply because he didn't want to be a leader nor own the title of master at all. He was fine taking orders himself.

Ironically, he was a childhood friend. They knew each other like the backs of their own hands. He tossed the bloodied helmet onto the ground and pulled the hair in his own face away. "Are you out on your own again? I know you're a pacifist, but you're going to get yourself in a grave one of these days." Illu nodded to this, wordlessly. They might have known each other well, but that didn't mean it was sunshine and rainbows. It often led to a conflict as they were completely different people.

Illusion looked into the hole the beast had come from. It was so deep... And dark.

He knew what was probably on the other end. "Have you ever been down there?" Illusion asked. "You're a warrior. You hunt regularly. Have you seen where they wander below?"

Leo shook his head. "Not really. Not far, anyway. I know there's entrances, but most of us have been called back before.. Going all the way. Why?"

Illusion hated that he wanted to see further. It's the only reason why he pushed himself forward in the slightest.

He wanted to see.. Their world. In general. He wasn't the only one. He knew..

"Earth to Illusion?" He shook it off, and looked at Leo again. "I just wonder what it looks like I guess. It sounds... Scary." He put his facade up. Though Leo could see through it. "Don't get the wrong ideas." He stamped the ax into the ground. "If you somehow think there's greener grass on the other side, it's not. They're feral. They're animals. It's not right." Illusion nodded. "Yeah... I get it." He went to walk away with that. For the sake of avoiding the conversation and any conflict that may come from it.

"What... No thankfulness at all?!"

The walk home began. He wasn't really paying attention to the world around him, which was another big mistake. It didn't matter right now to him. He was lost in thought as to what the world outside of this place was like. The monster side and the world outside as a whole. The mind in him sizzled with so much inspiration. An electric current that fizzled out far too often when he was at his own home.

The facade Illu had to place on himself at home went many layers to the point he didn't have any layer that was truly himself. It was a pain. The only time he had the opposite was when he was with one other friend..

One that he coincidentally lived rather close to, actually. Once in his yard he pondered if she needed to be let in on his daydreaming again.

They talked a lot about the inner workings of his mind. They were much like children again when they did that. Or... More like children should be? Since they were barely adults yet at all. Then

again, people were forced to be more like adults at this age anyway. If they got to be children much at all. You rarely heard kids playing in the streets here, they mostly tucked away inside their houses being afraid of kidnappings from mythical gremlins. He stepped into the yard regardless and knocked on the door. It seemed no vehicle or mighty steed was here, so..

"Hiya!!" The door gleefully swung open with a bright eyed, autumn haired girl to greet him.

"Illusion, what are you doing here?!" She grabbed him up by the arm before he could even speak and pulled him inside.

She was so joyful somehow, and it admittedly made him feel just a little more joyful even when he didn't speak. "I've been doing the house junk for hooooours.. I'm so glad to have you here! It's boring as shit!" She quickly covered her mouth after saying that word. "Whoops! Forgot that's not ladylike! Crap!" It was purely sarcastic. She didn't really care, it was her family that cared more.

"Elizabeth.." The most normal name here... Purely because she wasn't really in the hunter trade herself. Her family didn't pull her into it even if they participated. She got to be blissfully unaware of everything. She got to have a choice. "I have to be home soon, I just need someone to get my thoughts out. If you're not busy?"

She nodded, still basically tugging him off to the kitchen. "Sure thing- I mean I'm sorry if I'm a little busy while you do so I have obligations here.." Like being the stereotype and being forced to do the kitchen work still. He stood by the sink and collected his words.

"I've been really thinking about getting away." Illusion bluntly said. "Erasing my existence.

Getting as far off the grid as a man can and cutting contact with this town as much as possible. Maybe even.."

It wasn't something he had never proposed before.

"Joined the big green gang?" Meaning monsters of course.

He nodded. "I have a theory."

She quietly continued her thing, scrubbing plates and such. Before bringing the point up further.

"Theories only get you so far in many situations. Theories can get you dead. Are you really sure you won't drop?" Not really. He was sure he didn't care. Nobody in their right mind would attempt that if they did. And nobody would admit to not caring in a moment like this.

"Well, I'm at least coming too." She put the sponge down and clapped a little in overexcited sureness. "Because like hell am I going to be stuck like this. And I always knew something fucky was going on here.." She was no fool even if she acted like it. He was never the only one that assumed monsters were not as bad as the bad guys let on. "You have no survival skills when I have little." Illusion didn't try to sugarcoat for her. "I can use a fork." And she gave no shit. "Plus, I watch TV. And you can't convince me otherwise.

It was like when an RPG forced you to have a party member, he wasn't pushing her away.

"I'll see what I can do and call you after. I have a feeling I know where to find what we need to get out of here and find where they hide out mainly." And it was going to be... A risk.

"You got it! Now get outta here and get on your feet. Wherever those feet take you. If you won't be productive yourself, I'll kick you out of here with this." Elizabeth grabbed a wooden spoon and smacked her free palm with it. She was approaching with it in order to give him a smack and ironically felt it was a means of telling him she knew how to use it. Contrast to not knowing how to fight.

He ran. Although he didn't have much of a childhood as is, he still knew how to have a grin as he left as if playing a game with her. And... He had to enjoy himself before his latest lecture. When he got home, the parents were there too. His father was locked in his room as he was most times, and his mother was sitting upon the couch with a book of some sort, a decently fancy looking one at that. He didn't bother to greet her both because he didn't like her and because he didn't want to interrupt whatever she was reading. That room his father was in however... That was what he was aiming for. He was never really allowed in there, nor his father's outdoor shed. That shed was always locked up even tighter than his room and he assumed that meant this room held not only secrets, but the key to getting in the shed as well. Illusion waited outside of the door for his father to exit it, for now. To have a word with him, and to observe as to where he could get into that room from. If needing a key to that as well or not. He was going into this a bit blind, and confused, but he had spirit.

Exiting, his father came out with freshly ripped clothing and the leg of some sort of beast over his shoulder concealed in a bag, what looked like a garbage bag. "Illusion- What are you doing here?! Listen, you really don't need to see what I'm carrying right now." He darted his eyes around the room in anxiousness.

"Father, Leo sliced the throat of a monster that threatened me earlier today. I know what dead things look like. I've been to the arena multiple times and had to fight for myself." He gave him a frustrated look for this, to his father.

"You might have seen that, sure, but you haven't seen just how horrible it can get." His father still pushed his maturity aside, which ate at him yet again. "Good on him, though."

As his father went to walk away, Illusion noticed he had not even locked the door behind him. Perhaps this wouldn't be as complicated as he assumed.

He slipped into the room behind him once he figured his father had walked off enough. Inside.. It smelt like freshly chopped wood and metal.

It was mostly weapons, what looked like tools of all sorts, and what you'd usually see in workshops. It was tame, and he was frustrated. He didn't know where to look for a shed key. He looked through the work tables and struggled.

Where he least expected, the key was stuck in not a table nor a suit of armor, but a jar on said table filled with milky water of some sort that made his skin crawl. Just as he had pocketed it, his father stepped in and walked up behind him. He had a split second to pocket it before he was confronted.

"What are you doing here..?" He growled over his shoulder.

"I uh... Felt unprotected. After nearly getting my head bit off by a beast I needed to borrow weapons. Whatever was the best."

He was picked up by the back of his shirt and lifted from the ground with ease. "Boy, you better be telling the honest to god truth to me or I will use several of these to make your transition go backwards."

He threw him out of the room to land on his face and stomach.

"You'll be seeing one of those arenas in a week."

He didn't leave his room for the rest of the day.

It was all too terrible. He curled into a fetal position and ached while he remembered the past matches at that place he dealt with, frozen in place as monsters too terrifying stood in front of

him seemingly brainwashed into where they were. Their eyes looked... Blank, only staring with bloodlust in their eyes. One of the scariest he could remember was what looked like skinless meat with claws, on all fours looking down to him. Its body was so large that it looked like an elephant or hippo. The face, however, looked like a rodent.

The teeth looked like a mouse at the end of an elongated face. Its skinny legs drug itself over in an uneven way, like they struggled to carry its weight.

It didn't waste time to lean in to him and open its mouth, it looked even more like flesh sloppily stuck to bone.

He had to get out of here. He couldn't do this again. The cheering in amusement as he nearly got eaten.

This is abuse. This isn't training.

That night, he snuck out. He walked straight out of his house quietly and to the yard. Illusion was blessed with the namesake of being light on his feet, he praised that nobody woke.

To the back of the home, and into the shed. He unlocked the door. A foul smell met his nose first, but he couldn't see what was in the room. The moon was not enough to show him.

He would regret pulling the string to the ceiling light.

In the room, walls were covered in blood. So was the table before him. It was stained, and decorated in it.

The smell was explained, it was metal and rot. Shelves beside the table were decorated in familiar jars, now filled with much more disturbing things. Floating were odd, preserved creatures long dead but kept in a state as if they themselves were small trophies. The pained idea in Illusion's mind assured him that he may have just seen the small fetuses of monsters ripped from their own bellies. Heads upon walls, legs whittled into walking sticks for the corners. Teeth in smaller jars that looked as though they were fangs from various creatures still with the skin of gums attached. Only more and more unspeakable items stood before him as if from a horror show in a butcher's worst nightmares.

Despite the need to vomit from this, he had to move forward. This was too morbid to just be for the safety of other humans. There had to be something else. Some sort of morbid enjoyment would have to be here for someone to do something like this to a living creature. Why would they keep these things otherwise? Why would they celebrate the death of another creature that lived just like they did? Why was there a need for slaughter?

He opened the drawers of the table. Illusion dug through what seemed to be stained junk until finding an envelope of some sort. It looked very professional.. clasped shut rather tightly. With little care of taking time, he tore the envelope instead of struggling with the clasp on it and dug out the papers. There were many... Many stacks. It looked a lot like classified documents from a movie. Due to fear of somehow being caught reading such a thing, he locked the door behind him. He knew without the key to said building nobody would be getting in now anyway, so locking would be great.

Sitting onto the cold floor he scattered every paper in order, and read.

It became apparent that... These came from the exact thing the books had told. Experiments on the same things the corpses were scattered. And he cringed at the details listed.

For days before his birth, ages ago..

The first monsters were found. Fairies in the wilderness, sprites. They were taken by surprise by these creatures.

Of course, their first assumption was to cage it and take it with them.

They attached pictures of these small people in glass cases, wires hooked to their little bodies.

People in

coats proceeded to interrogate them, information on this interrogation was below.

"I just want out of here..! What on Earth do you think you're doing?! We've never been this disrespected before! We have a life!" They begged. "You're going to regret this! You'll regret this when our people take your eyes and stick them upon the asses of boars!"

They didn't take this seriously. They instead took the creatures and filled them with electric bolts to see if they were immune. Their little bodies were reduced to nothing but crisps. This was disappointing, they needed more.

More... And more... And more.

Different kinds, different torments. They dissected, burnt, drowned, and suffocated. The monsters did so little to fight. They didn't want to harm the humans, and this seemed to make them feel more secure. They felt their actions held no consequences.

They were wrong.

The near last document was about monsters in captivity fighting for freedom, as they broke their glasses. What could be presumed after this note was what books described; The monsters started war in return. For plenty of good reasons.

Knowing that these things were not just friendly research and observation of new species people found, but the horrid and immoral experiments of humans who assumed they were god, it made the things around him feel much more suffocating. Illusion himself felt like a figurative monster. Even after... Knowing he had almost been killed by a few. Their eyes...

Their eyes surely were cloudy from pain. Those people that controlled these arenas.. They were performing torture. The people at the arenas cheering were cheering purely for enjoyment of watching slaughter of

any kind. These humans were cruel.

Snapping out of this, he continued to explore the building. His assumption was correct, he found what looked like the entrance to a sewer, but that's no sewer entrance. That was the entrance to their domain, of which was what made his parents successful. These parts were mined from the one place they called home. Illusion's parents were trespassing and slaughtering from the one place they felt safe.

He swiped his phone from his pocket and called Elizabeth until she woke up.

"Eugh... Illu? I have a life you know..?" She groaned tiredly to him.

"I found it. I found an entry to the base. The monster base. Right outside my own home." Illusion was usually so quiet and yet he was nearly screaming. He took every willpower he had to contain it.

"You-... You what?" She rubbed her forehead with this one. "I'll swing by alright? Just... Hold up." She hung up on him. She wasn't thinking clearly enough for this.

Climbing out of bed and putting more appropriate attire on, and a coat and all just in case. She walked to his yard, to which Illusion had to text that he was in the back and unlock the door for her.

"Jesus, it smells like old shit after cooking and eating your shit." She then walked in and realized why. Unlike Illusion however, she couldn't hold her stomach and had to step out to empty it. Reluctantly, she complied and entered to find the entrance he had mentioned.

"Alright.. You've gotten us both into this. Where's step two?" She was so pained, light headed and shaking slightly.

"I guess we're going down?" Illusion offered,

"Are you kidding?! I already smell like I murdered someone! What's it going to smell like in a beastly chamber?!" She was so against becoming a typical housewife, but yet she whined about smelling terrible and wanted to be clean. "Do you want to live your life as it is now, or do you desire freedom too? Because this is not free."

She was speechless, and frowned. This hit her like a very unwanted brick.

"Fine... I'll try."

The plate blocking the entrance itself was far too heavy for Illusion or Elizabeth to lift easily. They struggled, placing fingers under it and lifting it to a decent degree but it still was not entirely open. They could however see it was a ladder going deeply under the ground below them,

"Do we... Really have to climb that far?" Elizabeth whimpered at the sight. "Can't go anywhere without hard work, even if it's emotional only." And this right now proved it, with struggling to lift this so badly.

But they would both be interrupted by the sounds of a pained howling outside. It caused them a scare enough they both dropped the cover entirely and stared out the windows.

It was no dog. It was much bigger, and it was right outside. It was growling so deeply, it sounded like a crackled motor.

Before Illusion could go to turn off the light in a hopeless attempt to conceal them both, the window was shattered.

The beast was inside now, circling them like prey until it gathered the surroundings were too tight to do so very much. It decided instead of intimidating its prey, it would simply lunge to them. Illusion grabbed the leg cane from before and shoved it into the beast's jaws, leaving it to bite that instead of the two of them. "Elizabeth! Grab a weapon right now!" Illusion cried, as Elizabeth scurried to find some sort of weapon to attack the creature with. She was too rushed and panicked, instead of grabbing an obvious blade she grabbed a hammer and went to bash its skull. Only for it to pull away from the cane and tear into her wrist.

She screamed, louder than anything Illusion had ever heard. He froze and watched in horror as she began to cry out in fear and pain whilst being mauled. His legs locked under him. It was so far late until he could move again and grab a proper sword to behead the beast with. The first blood he had ever had on his hands in ages.

By that point, she was limp on the ground. He was fearful that she was dead.

Dead would have been a better date for her, as she slowly started to twitch and contort on the ground. Making horrible sounds as she did so, and her bones cracked as they twisted.

She begged for help in a creaking and rattling way. And before Illusion's eyes, his previous friend became the very same creature that had attacked her.

He panicked, grabbing the head of the beast and the weapon he had defeated it with and by the power of

adrenaline and fear he opened the tunnel on his own. The sheer force of his situation empowered him enough to force it open even if his arms ached after and all he could do was slide down the ladder with a grip from one hand.

It was so far down, and so very dark. Once he got to the bottom, he couldn't see but a prick of light from above. He used the sword he had grabbed to light ablaze and be a weak torch.

With this head, he burnt the flesh away until it was but a skull. Breaking the jaw, he wore it as a mask over his own face. And he walked, deep into the tunnel before him and hoped that even just the skull on his face could trick a monster.

Suddenly, an unpleasant surprise would meet him as the now wolfed Elizabeth was chasing him already. She was not using a ladder but dragging her claws against the walls and sliding down the canal.

In a growling, hoarse voice, she called his name. He was now running down the darkened hall and holding his new mask to his face. "Elizabeth..! Stop..!! It's me!!!" He called out, hopelessly. "I know... Who you are..!" She yelled, getting to the floor and running on all fours.

"You... Know..?" Illusion was confused and fearful.

He just kept running. Running as hard as he could until his knees gave out under him right in front of a strange door.

He slid, ripping flesh on his knees. He hissed in pain as the mask on his face was dropped and instead was met with a new face staring into it looming over him. Though he held a weapon shakily now, he struggled and couldn't do anything with it.

"You... Did... This.." Elizabeth growled. "I... Shouldn't have.. Come here. You... Convinced me of freedom. I'm in hell now..!!" She snarled, and opened her mouth almost snake-like. It was approaching to snap his face from his skull until her ears rose upwards. Almost as if they sensed something coming.

A light flashed in between them, startling them both and sending Elizabeth backwards. A small imp creature with devilish horns and eyes of a goat, yet a face round and nearly featureless otherwise appeared. Waving its finger in a 'No no' expression, it shook its head. "Not so fast fuzzy girlie! Guests don't fight out here!" Snapping its fingers, the wolf was flung backwards and onto her rear. Somehow, she found herself paralyzed suddenly. She couldn't move, instead shaking in place and looking panicked. Illusion quickly covered his face with the skull he had dropped before the creature turned around. "You smell familiar... Yet your face looks very unusual. Monsters rough play all the time, I can't blame ya for it. But we have serious business to tend to, ya know?" He spoke in a chipper tone but was still... Oddly wicked. It was laced in sarcasm and anger somehow. "I've uhh... Been creeping around the house above here." The imp tilted his head. "House above...?" He looked down the hallway..

"Ahh shit...! You didn't come down that passage did you?! Those guys will gut you to the bone! We've been trying to fill this up for months! Are you a bonehead or what?!" He grabbed him by the arm and pleaded. "You gotta swear to me you don't go back in there you hear me? Not only would you end up dead, my skin is on the line! I'm supposed to be looking out for every bastard that passes through this place and gets in that door. Every. One. If you end up dead and it gets back to the big guys, I'm outta a job and a life!" A job...? Do they have these? And they know about them that well...? He had to ask a lot of questions before this guy vanished. "You uh... what now? What about back there, you need to slow down. Why are you not supposed to go up a place that's already got a ladder?"

The imp tapped his foot on a platform that didn't even exist under him to begin with. He mumbled some things and thought hard. "Alright... Lemme think about how to... Start." He looked around the room. Pointing to the far end of the left, "You see these passages next to ya? We have all sorts of walkways down here. But this one? The far back one?" As he talked, he was changing directions. Now he pointed where Illusion had come from. "This way was made by your enemy. The humans. We may have our own tech, but you'll notice ours is much more rocky and ruined than the fancy walls that had. But look.."

He floated over and knocked his little knuckles on a clump of rocks surrounding the way Illusion had come through. "We've been struggling to fill this up for a while. The humans kept coming through this way and killing us off like our colony was some sort of hunting range. Our reports from the big guys is that these have been showing up in other colonies for some time and they've been struggling to build around it too. Every time we try, the rocks end up shattered and it doesn't end well."

Illusion nodded... "Sorry to ask, uhh... I'm not from here. I came from the forests, not under the earth." He nodded. "It's fine. A lot of critters have been digging down to our halls and migrating down here. It's unsafe above... Not like it's any better down here either.." He rubbed his own horn uncomfortably admitting to that. "Listen kid. Rule number one, from me? Not everything is what it seems. If someone tells ya a colony is safe and an escape from the troubles in this world? They're lying. We're all dying. I could not wake up in the morning. We've accepted that. Keep moving forward and you'll find our chief in particular, talk to him and he'll let you join our family. Feel free to explore though."

He looked to the paralyzed wolf and snapped his fingers again, letting her paralysis leave. "You? You better run along. We don't take kindly to the behavior you showed today. I may look weak, but I can skin you. And I'll wear your flesh like a suit. Not ethically sourced."

The werewolf went to walk away, but she looked back to Illusion for a moment. Her glare told him enough.

She wasn't done with him. She hated him now. And he knew it. She was sentient, she knew what she did.

And she had a grudge.

The door behind him opened. It was a whole new world behind him now, and he was gaining answers, quicker than his own mind had the ability to load. It was scary, really scary. But, his whole life was. He couldn't help but ache inside, not for his family for sure but.. For leaving Leo behind.

He told him so often not to dig too deep, ironically. Now he had dug his way under the earth, and he wasn't climbing out too easily.

"Hey, kid?"

The imp called to him. He jolted back to reality and looked back at him. "Yeah..? Sir?"

The imp laughed in his little, demonic laugh. "Sir..? I'm no royal. But eh, I was wondering.. You're probably already tired. Unless you're nocturnal, you need a place to sleep first. Lemme take you to an inn? We have those down here to help folks like you, and to heal up the sick and injured from fights. Think you could need it. Call me Devi, like Devil but a little less implications."

Illusion nodded.. "I'm Illusion. I'd appreciate it a lot.. I've been running for way too long today." Come to think of it? There were a lot of milestones today. And it felt like he hadn't spoken to others nearly as much as he had today too. Maybe it was the fact he never spoke to his parents in a positive manner, or for very long at all, but he felt more comfortable talking to an imp that looked like it crawled from long forgotten religious texts than his own species. "Come on! I'll get you there quickly. I know this like the back of my hand!" He was so excited to help him, too.. It felt nice. It felt genuine, even.

He was led into the ominous doors, and through the hallways. And although he continued to be his quiet and timid self, he still carried small conversations as they walked. And slowly, although he had no clue what some of these smaller doors held, he felt more at home than he ever had.

Much more ominous doors stood before him. They were wooden, locks upon them were removed and two large men opened them to unleash the cheering of what seemed like thousands of people onto his small ears. He held the hand of his father, but it somehow felt so empty still. He was walked into the open arena, but was let go of. He was shaking. He hated being here, watched by so many people just to fail. Across from him, far away, was another door. But to the right of him, a pedestal. It was covered in crossed weapons to choose from. Illusion was more experienced with the small dagger and the slingshot, at the time. He took them, and ammo for the slingshot that laid on the ground in a bag. They were essentially small explosive pellets with buttons, of course. He waited for the inevitable. Soon, the doors opened. And a red serpent slithered out of it, directly to him.

Weakly, he stabbed at its nose. He was but a child, and he had only ever fought smaller at his home for practice and even then Illusion simply couldn't kill the creatures. Like always, he would almost be swallowed up in its wet, pink mouth. It looked like a giant snake, even the fangs and tongue did so. The jaws were unhinged like one too. He seemed to have a habit of attracting these types.

From above, his father dove down to slay it with his own sword, driven through its forehead. To the dismay of a booing audience Illusion swore wanted him dead. Once his dad landed on the ground, he looked disappointed as well. Taking his hand and simply telling him "Come along." In his almost apathetic tone.

On the way home, sitting in a carriage, both parents were silent. The only thing he was comforted by was the cooling wind.

Every day, or every few days, he would be out in the field. Today he wasn't alone. He was with Leo, and it was mostly an excuse to leave him alone outside while his parents complained about him to their friends.

He knew it, deep down. It's part of the reason he barely spoke today, and come to think of it.. This would start a habit.

"He told me there was a big creature with hooves in the wilderness that other monsters used to follow around all the time." Leo was telling a story to him anyway, so his silence wasn't too uncalled for right now. "I don't remember the whole story, but he said it looked like plants grew up its antlers and it stared through his soul. And the others stuck close to it like a moth to the flame. I wanna play like one of us is the deer and one of us is the man in the story and we hunt 'em down and snag' em. One day I wanna catch it and make my dad proud." Leo looked so excited by this... Although he didn't feel like it very much, Illusion wanted to do it and make him proud too. "O-Okay... So who goes first- I mean who is the uh... Stag?"

Leo thought carefully... With a little 'Hmmm...' with a hand to his chin.

"You're the one that gets all spooked. You should be the hunter that's in my dad's story. We can switch off as time goes on and I can hunt you down as the deer next! Just shuffle 'em so we're both enjoying things."

Illusion nodded hard, like he was trying too hard. But they were both too young to know when either of them was faking it.

"Good! You go stand back there in the bushes."

He did as he was told. As he was in said bush, he held in a giggle as Leo shuffled through the greenery and got branches to pretend he had antlers. Just for the sake of being realistic, Illusion dug up a smaller one and held it like a gun to test it out. Aiming it around and deciding it was perfect.

"Come out Illu-Lu!" Leo called for him.

Illusion stepped out, careful not to trip. He wandered around, faking as if the open field was still a forest. Looking around aimlessly and ignoring the boy before him. Until he walked up on him, and froze up staring off into his eyes. They stared for some time, and it was hard to tell what he was thinking at this moment. As if a disembodied entity somewhere else was thinking about this moment with sentimentality and...

Sadness?

"Cut!" Leo announced, causing him to jump in two places. For now, there was only one. "Okay, split off."

He handed him his antlers before running away. "Go!! Get posed up and ready to be chased!"

Illusion actually giggled for once. He ran to the other edge of the field and stood posing with the antlers.

Afterwards, in almost no time for that matter, Leo ran out of the woods and chased him around for some time until they both ran the energy out of him.

They laid in the field and looked up at the clouds after..

"Do you think I could ever make my dad proud?" Illusion asked about the statement Leo had made earlier. It resonated with him a little. "Sometimes I wonder if I would have decided to stay a girl, he would have treated me with more praise like my mom."

Leo sighed a little.. "No matter what you do, bad people won't change for you. And with the way my parents talk.." The two families, having known one another... "It sounds like they're just as bad as you've said and they aren't changing their minds."

Funnily enough, he woke up around this time. Jumping awake startled from his own mask covering his nostrils. He was afraid it was suffocating him, when in reality he was okay. Tossing onto his back, he stared at the rocky ceiling and thought about the memory he had dreamt of. He must have thought about him too hard before or something, but a lot of those details spoke to him. The deer, and the quote he said about never satisfying bad people.. Over the years, that would become more true.

He placed a hand onto his chest..

Whatever he did down here.. It was for his own sake. But Illusion knew he had to stop this war, and live to see Leo again.

Traveling outside of his room later, he was met with a sense of confusion and adventure. He wanted to see everything, but also was nervous and knew of where he needed to be.

The first door he went through though was... Covered in gold on the floor.

Coins and treasure were everywhere. It was more than he had ever known or seen or... Dreamt even. An older woman, seemingly like that of an orc of some sort, leant over the desk in front of him and looked rather bored.

"Hello..?" Illusion greeted awkwardly. He wasn't used to this still.

"Sup?" The woman greeted. "Pick up and go on."

Admittedly, he had expected a different tone from her. But, that wasn't the confusing part.

"Huh...? Just pick up?"

She rolled her eyes.

"We swipe this from the overworld, the above. And give to those in need." She explained. "You can grab as much as you want, someone stocks up this place daily. We just steal again." That amazed him, but.. Would he really need it? Especially since he was a disguised human anyway. But... There's the whole thing with being on an adventure and having empty pockets.

"What's the hold up?"

Why not? He picked up a little and stuffed his pockets. "Thank you... Ma'am?"

She seemed surprised to be met with politeness like this. She was speechless and wide eyed.

"Err... No problem."

He scurried back out and onto the next.

It was a room mostly empty, but having a river across it from one wall to the next. He approached it and looked into the river, and it was full of small aquatic creatures. He didn't know if they were sentient like him,

understanding of words at least, but he still waved and it seemed like they could see it. He felt like he impacted something at least. And deep down, he wondered about how much they were alike. Illusion was bad at speaking, and they couldn't speak but seemed to see him and understand a greeting. Were they really so different?

The next room seemed to be filled with food on tables. It was empty though, and he oddly felt like he was trespassing at the time. He was no thief. He didn't take any even if he had none and was ill prepared.

Every other room just had other monsters doing their own thing. And it just served him more reason to see these people as... People. They weren't just monsters. They were talking to one another, running shops and having families. There were small monsters. There were all sorts for

everything. How could he kill something that was just living their lives? They were... Just as home as any other.

Finally, another big door stood before him. His hands were shaking while he opened it. Walking in and seeing... The largest monster he had ever seen.

The body of a canine of some sort, but the head of a wise owl. Two long tails decorated with what looked like blades across and at the tips of them. It looked down to him, and felt as if it knew all and saw many. He stopped at its huge foot and placed a hand onto it.

"Hello...? What do I refer to you as?"

It tilted its head and stared into him.

"Friend."

He nodded, "Friend.. I have a confession only you need to know." Illusion felt somehow safe with this wise creature, he felt almost as if it already knew what he was about to do. He removed the skull from his face. "I've come to put an end to everything. I can't stand to see a civilization crumble over foolishness. Please take me under your paws and help me help all of you. I don't know where to go, but I know what I need to do."

Like a feline, the owl's eyes closed for a moment in a silent and peaceful way. Once again, understanding

"You know there's many of these places, correct?" Friend of all asked.

Illusion nodded. "But it's under my knowledge you're mostly ruled by one? Or..? Am I mistaken?"

It shook its head. "We have rulers just as you. I'm not the only one like me. And though I am a friend, I am as cruel as a tornado. A hurricane with an eye in the storm. We kill to live, and live to love."

The owl raised its head and looked to the ceiling. A small rumble echoed in the crusts that made up the walls of the place. It thought for a moment, taking in the sounds around it and being at peace with everything and yet with so many thoughts in its mind.

"To reach the ruler you need to be properly ruled. I will assign you someone to take you where you need to be, and you must ask to join their army. It will not be easy, but upon proving your worth you will see the

m. I don't want to spread blood, but it's the only way."

Illusion lowered his head. "It doesn't look like I'll ever be free of shedding some sort of blood now, at least

not until it's over."

The creature lowered its body and seemed to curl around him. "Peace comes to everything eventually, even if that inevitable is death. You'll see peace as long as you keep walking, and if that means death? You'll still have walked. Your life didn't lose meaning, it only achieved what it meant. If you're meant to fix something here, you will. If you're not, you did what you should have."

Illusion nodded, a small sense of peace.

"Is fate real then?"

It nodded. "Fate is a concept, but it's a concept as much as death. It's something that always existed in some way, we just gave it a word. You always existed, but you have a word."

He smiled a little at this. "You know many things."

"I've seen many things." It replied. "And I've lived many days."

He only had one more thing to ask the creature;

"Friend...? May I stay with you just some time longer? You seem somehow so familiar, and comforting to me.. I've been through far too much. I want to be somewhere I don't have to hide." It nodded.. "I don't get this very often. I feel as though you'll surprise me in many new ways."

The two sat in silence for some time. All Illusion wanted to do was sit and enjoy a moment of comfort and to take off the mask for some time, partly literally.

He felt he could say anything to the canine bird and he wouldn't be judged.

"You know I've talked more here than I have ever done so before. I've spoken to more monsters than I have talked to most humans."

The bird head was tilted. "Most?"

Illusion nodded. "My best friends... Elizabeth and Leo. Leo knows me like he knows his own hands, and Elizabeth..."

Illusion looked at his mask.

"We were so close, but I feel she doesn't want me anymore. She was turned into a monster, and she hates me because of it. She blames me because I convinced her this would be freedom."

Friend nodded. "The worst thing you'll ever see is the tides of time. As time goes on, friends will be different than you know. This one was... Not so close. So, you're to expect you won't always stay in agreement.

This is not the future she wanted." He looked down.. "I am named Friend because Friend is a word I learnt before any other. Friends are kind and understanding even after hardships."

Illusion was the one to nod after this. "Yes... My one hope is that one day I won't be hated and I will be understood and likewise. A-And Leo... I left him without a word. I need to end this conflict and get to him again.

Friend seemingly smiled with its eyes. "That is the kind of bond I wish I would have been able to have forever.. But my years made it leave so soon."

Illusion seemed slightly more determined with this. "I want to make you have as many friends as you can handle from all races. I want to destroy the human species's opinion and make them see the truth of it all. Even if it means we have to break into their labs and pull that evidence from their hands."

The owl creature nuzzled up to him and curled around his smaller body like a cat. "I want to live, and die, just like that."

Illusion suddenly remembered something he had to ask;

"Friend...? Do you know of a deer monster? Leo told me a story of a deer leading a pack of monsters in the forest once, that scared a human so much he wanted to hunt it one day."

Somehow, Friend was so old and wise, it knew nearly everything. This was one of them.

"The deer god... It is something of worship to us all. It is known in many worlds for many years. If someone believed they could kill the great stag, they would surely meet death in return."

That frightened him. "Friend...! I cannot allow him to hunt that then! It's a death wish!"

Friend nodded slightly from where it laid its head. "I will pray for the deer's mercy if he hunts to this day. The deer is loyal and kind, I don't believe that, if asked, it would let him die."

Illusion sighed. "Thank you..."

Upon Illusion's shoulder suddenly sat a familiar imp. "You called, Friend?" The imp asked, saluting it in a silly and energetic way.

"This will be your guide." Friend spoke to Illusion. "Follow the small devil through the caverns. There is a route that will take you instead directly to the one true king."

"Why do you look like one of the bald monkeys above now? Is that a cool disguise so you don't get killed?" Devi asked Illusion.

"Err- Yes! And watch this.." He turned around, placing the mask on his face, and quickly turned again to reveal his new face. Supposedly.

"Whoa... You've got those fancy magics. Come on..!"

As much as Illusion didn't want to part with the creature yet, he got up and followed Devi. Into the bowels of the hidden camps.

The tunnels had swift mines and other forms of transport to seemingly drive far distances. While listening to Devi ramble and thinking about the previous conversation, it seemed it took no time to get to.

"Do ya wanna visit any of the smaller shops? Or do you want to get there quickly? The big boss telepathically said only the king, but... I wanna be polite." Devi asked.

"Serious business. I can explore later." Illusion was rather blunt with this and was ready to go.

"Alright..! Let's go!"

With that, they went forward. Through countless stairs and scaling up the rocky platforms of the place, they made it to a throne room in which stood an even larger creature, cloaked in darkness. One violet colored eye opened to stare him down, seeming as if the king was missing the right eye.

"State your business." Spoke the ominous figure, in an almost hissing tone.

"I have something to speak about privately sir... Is there anyone else here but Devi? And Devi... May you step out?"

Devi politely vanished in thin air with this, and there seemed to truly be nobody else. So, the king was pitch silent. Other than the eerily unblinking eye.

Illusion bowed his head, holding the mask in place. "I have come to state that I want to help you in your fight for justice for your race, sir. But I must inform you.. I am truly the son of a rather well known group of masters. I broke into their shack and reached this place by a hole drilled into one of your clans. I saw the documentation of what really happened. Please.."

He removed his mask and stared up to the eye, bravery not allowing him to be a coward in the face of it. "

I am tired of being forced to fight a group of people simply wishing to live alongside other people. I want to defend you, and rise to show the uneducated the truth until they allow you to live in peace with them."

From under the shadow, a green scaled tentacle reached out to him. It smacked the skull from his grasp.

"You no longer need this mask. If you speak the truth, you'll be granted a proper mask to cover your face and be taken to our secret base of war." A pause.. "If you fail and are found to be a spy, however.. You will be publicly executed in front of the humans to make a message. A message to never dare send a spy to us again. And you will be cut limb from limb."

A shiver hugged Illusion's spine, but he should have expected this. "You're well heard, my lord. I promise to not let you down. I was made to kill anyway."

The tentacle returned with a mask, specially made. It looked like a cat of some kind, made of plastic of some sort. "Wear this, and you will truly become what your name implies. According to Friend... You are Illusion?" It seemed the telepathy strikes again. "You will become an illusion, as the spell woven into this feline mask will make you appear as just another monster to both humans and other monsters alike. You will seem like a snow white cat on two legs, killing those on your way to freedom."

He took the mask, staring into its empty eyes before putting it on. Feeling tingles through his body as the spell became one with him.

And he felt lightheaded. He dropped, falling unconscious. Obviously, Illusion wouldn't be allowed to just step into a secret base. If he were a spy, he would leak information as to where it was. This was most wise. And the king knew so.

When Illusion had opened his eyes, his head ached horribly as if he had been knocked in it rather hard by something. He leant up and adjusted his mask, looking around the bamboo hut he had found himself in. It was relatively empty, the room. It looked like a small bedroom. Getting up, his limbs felt shaky.

"Careful. You've been out for a while."

Someone was suddenly in front of him, their heads nearly bumping into one another. The stranger caught him and made sure he didn't fall to the floor.

"My name is Kevin. I'm sort of- Or... I was in your place once. For different reasons. I joined for safety." He was a long haired and dark skinned individual, he seemed to be masculine but androgynous..? For the sake of making sure he didn't misgender. "What are your pronouns, friend?"

Kevin took a moment to think.. "He is fine, they is fine, mostly anything but she..?" He shrugged. "Not everyone cares to ask.."

Illusion shook his hand, and removed the mask as it seemed Kev knew he was not a monster somehow. "I'm trans myself. You looked like you could be in some way by your vibes? You seem uhh... Queer. Not in the derogatory way, nobody uses it that way anymore, but..."

He chuckled. "I get it... You're in the army camp right now. We're a small group of people on the monster side that specifically works on attacking and defending. We get raided by people that look for new monsters to play with."

That brought back flashbacks, but he was over it.

"We're both humans, or previously so anyway.. But I would suggest you put the disguise on. I will mine too.." He put on glasses, which seemed to cloak him into an ominous and demonic shadow with only the glowing eyes he had covered in view. "My role is the smart one. I am The lurker. I collect intel and stalk groups of humans for their plans, report back and prepare us. I can also hack into many of their tech." He went to walk off, as Illusion put on the mask and to everyone but himself he was once again the cat.

"You'll be on the field. I'll keep you hooked on the info. I have telepathic ability as well, you don't need tech to hear me in your head."

Admittedly, Illusion found it rather badass of the ally.

They walked into the main room, there were others here. But the lurker approached a large and muscular snake person with the lower half of a snake and the upper of a scaled human. Their head looked almost like a dragon, with spikes and a long horn upon their head like that of a unicorn. Their back had... A rather long scar onto it.

"This is Drake. They are the leader of most serpent and dragon groups. They'll be joining you on many raids for their camouflage skills."

With a flick of a tongue and the click of their fingers, the serpent became nearly invisible from blending into the wall behind them.

"Intimidating, especially for a new guy, but we can work on that." Illu was surprised a guy could even intimidate him at this point, but this adventure was really pulling all of the stops on him now.

"Maybe when you prove you're strong on your own, you'll be able to get out there on a solo mission or two?" Lurker suggested to him. "Until then, I exist to make sure you don't get your dick crushed by a car or something." Drake nodded as he spoke.

If only they knew just what he had been through and done already..

"I think you both should work something simple just to get Illusion used to this... How about you head out to the outskirts of the local city? Someone's always there trying to err.... Breed."

Awkward to explain this.

And Illusion's insides were cringing.

"Aye, they'll be too distracted. Let's grab the gear."

Following Drake's lead, Illusion got weapons and left the bamboo fort. They seemed to be tucked into a crater of some kind, the surrounding greenery was dead in a circle. Outside of which were a large surrounding of forests and even further... Lights. A city's lights. It was so close to wander to a cliff that looked out to said city.

It was simple. Kill some humans and start commotion. They're the enemy.

But once Illusion met the car window... He was once again back to the same headspace.

That trauma space.

The space where every single time he was made to see someone die, every time he saw a monster die.

Every time he saw death in general..

He couldn't do it immediately. The pain to all of them he had ever seen was in his current victim's face.

Drake stared at him as well...

And was judging. He was at the opposite side and had already sank his fangs into the flesh of the person on this side. He basically crushed the face of the human with his tough dragon-like jaws. They looked humanoid, but somehow they were so strong they could crush a human skull. Seeing the creature essentially eat the frontal lobe of a human with their bare teeth snapped him out of it.

The zoning out stopped.

Somehow the spell he was under that allowed him to look like a feline made the ends of his fingers plenty

like a cat in the realm people inhabited. From his eyes, as confusing as it was to himself, his hands looked normal. But once he positioned said hands and sunk into the neck of the other human.. He was tearing it to shreds.

This was the first time he felt so much power over another life. And as much as he didn't want to admit it, it was oddly pleasing. The animal part of his mind felt nice having prey.

Drake could see it while he was tearing into the rest of the human's chest and frankly... Gained some sort of respect and fear from him. Before, they mostly saw him as some sort of talentless child. But now? He had some sort of morbidity in him that was shared between the two.

"Kid... Calm down. I get that your cat brain is going, but this isn't a mouse." He snapped at him. It didn't do anything, so he instead slithered into the car some more and slapped his hands away with the horn positioned on his forehead.

It worked. And admittedly, the aftermath of what he had done made Illusion somewhat nauseous. He learnt rather quickly that this form that the mask gave was much more unhinged than expected.. But maybe he could use it to his advantage?

They both left the scene and went on the walk back.

"What was that back there? You zoned out for some time." Drake hissed, their voice both caring and eerie.

"I uhh... I have a shitty past related to death. I don't do too good at it, but once I started the cat kicked in and I just.. Lost it. Still felt sick after though." Illusion opened up. Maybe Drake could be good even though they seemed like an intimidating individual. "Oh uhm... It seems other monsters have complex relations to gender. What is yours? What do you go by? I never got to explicitly ask."

Drake paused for a moment..

"Snake. I am just a serpent. I do not care. You may call me a man, or a thing. Or whatever you want. In the end, view me as my species. That's not a worry to me."

Illusion nodded.. "I'm a boy hands down. But... I carry this with pride now." He looked at his own hands..

He was a monster now as far as he was concerned. This was his family.

Something else interested him. "Say... Drake? May I ask about your horn? I see other monsters having that sometimes.."

The snake looked up at said horn. "Many of us have unicorn roots."

Illusion tilted his head a little, motioning him to expand.

"In the beginning of monster kind, many of us started from common ancestors. One of these was the equine. This, and serpents. Specifically gargoyle and dragon. These two looked much like other species, like snakes or bats." Drake explained.. "Our genes have added to why humans have hated us for so long and jabbed us with syringes. Our evolution is.. Muddled in their eyes somehow. And the unicorns.." He seemed tense.

It made Illusion more curious, but he knew that maybe now was not the time to ask.

It would bug him the entire time he got home though..

That night he laid in his new bed and wondered if he could somehow speak to Friend again. It was almost as if it knew simply by thinking of it.

"Illusion? What troubles you?"

Illusion was startled, but settled quickly. "Friend... I have a teammate that had a horn much like other people I've met during my adventures. And for some reason, he was too uncomfortable telling me what happened to the unicorns."

Friend seemed to grow quiet.

"Friend...? Is it that bad?"

"Humans don't like to tell what happened to them. But, they were some of the first monsters that the humans found were real." Friend explained. "They were partners of the fairies, sprites, elves and all. They were

great spirits, old and wise. And the reason my tails have knives. Most of us came from the unicorn. Now, the sight of a unicorn is rare. Possibly even impossible. But her children? We roam."

Heartache entered Illusion's very soul hearing this. He knew the monsters were tested on, and in brutal ways, but the humans had unicorns? And brutalized them? Every story he ever knew said they were beautiful and majestic as is. They were praised and loved by all. Why would they do this?

"The king is the closest to a unicorn, despite his appearance. His mother was one. She mated with one of the earliest gargoyles. He is many years old, and has seen much pain." Friend was audibly sad.. "He bears the scars to this day of when he exited that place. Though he is much kinder than he appears, he can be ghastly outside of the shadows. Please, find it in your heart not to stare, but have respect for his struggles.

Illusion nodded even if it wasn't visible to the being. "I'll... Take note of that. Thank you."

Friend was silent with that, and admittedly would be sad for the remainder of the time it spent awake.

The next mission started the next day. It was to another underground camp, located somewhere in the wilderness. Illusion was still being watched by Drake, because the rest of the gang back at HQ really didn't know if he was fit to be on his own yet, especially if hunters caught him themselves. It wasn't going to be easy.

They were off to find abandoned train tracks. Somewhere around there would be the entrance to a tunnel

way hidden under said tracks.

It was peaceful for the most part, and Illusion felt oddly soothed out here. The birds and regular fauna were at peace with one another, and the smaller, more animalistic monsters like winged squirrels and pixie rabbits were completely calm with the world around themselves too.

"This place feels warm, in the heart way." Illusion spoke to Drake as they walked.

"If you want the literal warmth, wait until you see my Homelands." Drake quietly spoke to him, looking around at the wilderness too. "We serpents live together in the mountains and deep in the rocks below. We live near the lava and heat."

Illusion nodded.. "You know I really like listening to your histories. I've only ever known what I heard growing up.."

Drake nodded. "We all come from the same things in the end. No bloodline is straightened, but its roots under the grass and sand. We tangle and twist around each other, and humanity will never like to admit to that. Even humans come from something close to us in the end." Was he, genetically, a monster too? Somewhere?

"Have humans bred with monsters too? Is that what you mean..?" Illusion had to ask. Drake nodded. "That's obvious. It's seen as taboo, but many have slept with monsters too. There's been affairs. There's just not much talk about what comes after that." That was... Troubling to think about. The poor children, possibly killed or tortured, or abandoned, because they had come from forbidden affairs. They managed to get to the tracks and Drake silently slithered off to find the hidden entrance. Leaving Illusion to stand by the trail and look out for trouble. It seemed Drake was going deeper into the tracks than they had entered, and Illusion slowly followed once he took notice. But there was howling in the distance. It wasn't your regular howling. And that made him uncomfortable.

"Drake..?" He called out. "The wolves... I think those are werewolves. I don't think I should be out here by myself. Can you please come back up to me and lead me with you?" He was shaking as he spoke, making this a useless call.

He tried to run after him, even if it made more noise. The woodland creatures were silent too, they knew what was best for them. He was the only loud thing here with his feet.

And suddenly, there was a branch crack behind him.

Not one, nor two, but three werewolves. And one looked scarily familiar now.

The instincts took over again. He tumbled down onto his hands and ran on all fours. Somehow despite the way he saw himself, he was running as an animal. He looked like an animal on the outside with the mask on however so it didn't matter much. He was just thankful that he was as quick as a real cat now.

They were still bigger than he was by so much more, especially the one that resembled Elizabeth. She was much bigger now. And they were on his literal tail.

He saw Drake in the distance, who also saw him. Coming to the rescue, Drake rocketed himself into the air and tackled the werewolf in the lead. Biting into its neck and injecting it with venom. When the third attempted to attack him for this, the snake flung their head back and punctured the werewolf through the chest with the blade-like horn on their head.

That left one other, that jumped after Illusion instead. Of course it was her.

Illusion had no other choice than to do this himself while Drake continued to fight the one other werewolf that was alive from this fight, though poisoned and in pain all over it was. Letting the wolf tackle him, he tumbled to the ground. Where he would roll with her and claw at her chest rapidly.

"You're not getting in there easily, you puss!" The wolf hissed at him through growling teeth. "I know that scent now..! I know who you are!"

Not many things ever sunk into Illusion's mind from being trained in combat, other than the book's weaknesses and attributes sections.

But what he did know was that if he blinded her, he would have a little extra luck.

He clawed her in one of her eyes.

"Ow- Shit..!! You little shit!" She grabbed at her one blinded eye, whilst sending her other arm after him. He rolled to that blind side and jumped into her back. Sending one poking finger into the other eye socket.

He poked a claw into it and pulled it straight out as she screamed in pain.

He then bit into the back of her neck and sunk his claws into her sides to not be shaken off.

Despite her twisting and rolling, he was determined to bite the flesh off of her neck to the bone.

Drake had poisoned the creature to the point of death, meanwhile. So much poison from his bites that no creature could have a moment to let their body withstand it.

He looked over to the two death-rolling animals and was once again shocked at Illusion becoming overtaken with instinct. Not as much as the first time, but the complete change in behavior so easily made them feel oddly proud.

He stood back. Watching them two instead of interfering.

"Stop it already..! I'll leave you alone! I was just angry..!" Elizabeth pleaded, though it was mostly false. She never intended to stop, she hated him for 'ruining' her life.

Suddenly, a voice appeared in Illusion's head. It was familiar. In fact, it was a Friend. Friend itself returning. It was always watching him now, and wanted to not change fate but was not going to let his life end here just to trust the wrong person. "Illusion! Do not believe her! She wants to kill you! You have to let her go.

She will not be your ally now. Do it.. It will hurt, but in this world you must take drastic decisions."

He bit straight into the bone, and began to pull.

"No...! You fool! You asshole!! You already took everything from me and now you're going to dispose of me like trash?! I hate you!! I'll kill you first!" She stood up, and was attempting to walk both of them back into a large stone nearby in order to crush Illusion to death. But before she could, he ripped neck vertebrae out of her.

Suddenly, her legs gave out. Sending her backwards, but not in the way she initially aimed for. Instead it was just to the ground itself.

Illusion crawled out from under her and looked down to her.

To make sure she was totally out for good, he slashed her throat with his claws in the front so that the blood would bleed dry.

He backed off after that and stepped backwards, shaky.

"Kiddo... You did what you had to do." Drake coiled up around him, comfortably, to Illusion's surprise. He never took the snake to be comforting.. He seemed more like someone stoic and quiet for a different reason, but he was almost being a parent..

"For what it's worth? I thought you were cool. And I think Lurker would promote you for it."

He looked up to him and rubbed his eyes dry. He had really cried from this..?

"Thank you... I wouldn't normally do this but.. I knew her."

He was patted on the back.

After this moment, they lifted the old tracks and climbed into a hole just big enough to slip down into the tunnels to a place not much different than Illusion had arrived in, walking in almost the same route to Friend

but now it was to someone entirely new. One with the body of a wolf and the head of an eagle, but many

tails that were more fox-like.

"Something tells me you two didn't come here to join our humble home?" The giant creature asked.

"Truth is, we came here to ask you a question." Drake spoke, "We're from the front lines, the camp set up in the crater to deal with the... Dirty work. We're asking for troops and any help you have at all. Any tips, even?"

The creature lowered its head.

"I know of a small camp in the wilderness stationed in an abandoned building. They have been hunting for quite a while and killing much of our community away in order to summon the horned one."

The horned one...

Illusion looked up to the creature. "You mean... The deer lord?"

The creature nodded. "They want to kill what gives us the very essence of life and death from the beginning."

That would mean...

Would Leo be with them? Or his family? It was reasonable to think.

"I want this to be mine." Illusion stated.

It was set. He would be the one to handle this, on his own. The objective? Mass slaughter of a camp of hunters. This was sure to tip them off, but that's partly what the gang had wanted. They wanted the humans

to know they were tired of this in order to confront them for good.

So, in the dark of night, Illusion crept up to the shake in the shadows donning a cloak and the illusionary

mask that had become a part of him. And brandished with claws and an ax. He sneaked up to the window

and peeked into it, seeing the humans sitting around in a circle around a small lantern. No Leo in sight.

Was he too young to join them in their eyes? They were mostly old cis men with beards and armor bigger than their ego.

Without thinking, he busted in and beheaded every one of them. He didn't care anymore and wanted it over quickly. Leo wasn't here, he had nobody to spare. And as far as he knew his father was also missing, so he wouldn't be faced with any sorrow when he got the news. Leo would be alright.

He stepped out soaked in blood, and wiped his sweaty forehead. Where on earth was he..?

Maybe he needed to take a trip "home" just once, in secret.

And then, he saw it.

A tall, blue glow in the distance. Staring him down as if he had just committed the worst crime in existence. He was frozen.

He could smell what smells like mint and old leather, and heard thousands of branches breaking at once as the creature eased its way over to him.

Before he knew it, the creature was inches away from his face. Their noses nearly conjoined.

And he saw the most chilling detail of the creature he could ever have prepared for.

It was a walking corpse.

Thousands of small roots were infesting its flesh, dug deeply into the decaying skin, fur sticking from in between the fine rods of tree like they were sewn into it. And the antlers themselves were tree branches and vines. Out of the eyes glowed a blue hue that leaked some sort of glowing sap, that seemed to be the source of the sweetening aroma. Upon close inspection, where the substance dripped on the ground grew new small plants and life despite its dead body.

Shakily, Illusion greeted the creature.

"Uhm... Hello..? You're the... Guy of the hour here huh?" Impolite seeing as he was speaking to a literal god compared to him. "Everyone seems to want you more dead than you already are."

The creature simply exhaled into his face, the roots and vines shifting with the flesh and it seemed like something under the skin still inflated where lungs should have been.

"If you see a young man with hair colored like autumn, usually pulled back in a bun because it's too long to have down during hunting, way younger than these...? And covered in scars.

Especially the arms. He's

a little sarcastic too.. Please don't hurt him." Illusion asked of the undead beast. "He wants to hunt you...

But he's the one human that was ever undyingly loyal to me and saved my life many times. He's not evil, and he has wanted nothing but my security. Don't give him death, lord..."

The creature paused seemingly all functions. But then, it rose and walked away.

Illusion only hoped that the right man was found and spared. He did what he had to do.

The forests were so large. The trees blocked out even the moon and sadly Illusion was no master to nightvision. He could have sworn he heard footsteps behind him every now and then as he walked, but saw nobody behind him, not even a woodland monster.

He saw lights up ahead and heard speaking, like humans. It frightened him. These would surely be alert and could easily kill him instead. He turned back and ran in the opposite direction.

It alerted the figures to him, actually. They came in swarms, until Illusion stopped and realized that he was surrounded.

But one took his hand.

He opened his eyes, after having closed them in anticipation of his terrible fate. To see a dark skinned elf before him.

"Whoa there feline friend, this is not a threat." The elf spoke to him. "We're a small colony of dark elves, no humans here. You've wandered into our territory. Come now, we offer comfortable beds during this time." He pulled his hand and led him along before he could even say anything. He was a rather insistent one.

"We live in the trees. Treehouses all over the place. We mostly use fire magic these days.

Ironically, our neighbors are the ice elves who fled from the mountain lands too. We make some interesting neighbors for em." And... He didn't know how to shut up.

"I'm Ailvira, or Ailvy for short by some."

They stopped in front of a large treehouse. "This is where you can stay for safety. There's also some nice books in the small library inside."

He finally got some quiet when the elf left him be. He did as he was told and stayed there, and the next morning he swung by the library.

There were plenty of books about shadow magic, which surprised him. And some included information about how to summon flames from the pits of hell itself that made souls themselves cease to exist.

That was Illusion's sign that he needed to leave this place as soon as possible. Lest he become literally nothing.

Back at the headquarters when he returned home, the others welcomed him with surprisingly open arms.

They were really worried about him, even Drake itself. It was a pleasant surprise, but admittedly a little overwhelming.

He deserved a break, or so Lurker assured him. He went to his room and returned to his favorite hobby of

staring at the ceiling, lost in thought.

Mostly about the book he had read on soul fire magic.

Could he... Learn magic? It was usually illegal for people to learn magic when not a hunter, but not only had he left his hunter title behind, he was a monster all of his own now. And magic knowledge came from monsters to begin with.

"Friend...? Can you hear me still?" He mentally called out to the friendly guardian he had come to know now. The two seemed to converse much now.

"Yes, child?" Friend always answered.

"I would like to learn magic, I think. But I do not know where to begin... My mother was the magical one in my family, but I was never taught much if at all that I remember.." His mother.. Hearthfire. She was talented in magic and only used that in fighting, not weapons.

His father, however, used nothing but physically damaging weapons.

It had been so long since he even watched her use her magic that he couldn't remember what kind..

"It's not very complicated." Friend assured, "You just have to trust yourself intimately. Trust that what you

will, will happen. Believe in the results, and you can make anything happen. Many poor souls have done so by accident through this.. Simply imagine you're lifting yourself into the air from your back, and you'll levitate."

In that case... He closed his eyes and imagined that he was slowly being surrounded in water, floating on

his back and being lifted into the air. He could almost feel the moisture on his skin, but it was so far from him.

Opening his eyes, he was definitely floating.

"Now... There's limitations, and talents to learn, but for the most part this is the defining characteristic." Friend chimed in. "You can now control things with your mind, at least."

Illusion softly landed on his back again, surprised his own jaw wasn't dropping.

"So... If I wanted to make water from nothing?" He asked Friend.

"You cannot make water or anything akin to it from nothing, you need to consider what you're using for th

at. Say... You want to make water? You must collect it from the air and change it." Friend explained..

He nodded. "I see... I see.."

With this, Illusion settled on learning magic full time with books and visiting Ailvira once again. Though the elf was talkative, they themselves were very skilled at magic. In fact, it seemed the whole village was. Although somewhat intimidating. After long enough, they blessed Illusion with a lucky hat. It looked much like a witches hat, but was covered in gemstones that sparkled when hit with moonlight. It seemed the elves believed in the moon like their goddess, as with some witches themselves in old times. Saddening that any witches that did so now without permission was eradicated. This made Illusion think..

We were long away from days of old now, where the land was free to believe whatever they wished. Because many beliefs had magic and spirituality, and knowing many cultural beasts were really meant... No one religion was truly wrong on everything. There were always truths in myths.

People stopped caring.

Now the old gods were just seen as monsters that needed killing, or not real at all, and this lost many old books.

Illusion took his time reading bibles of many other religions. He didn't know what to think of any, and didn't

want to know, he simply wanted to know about them. He wanted to know of the days he had lost. He grew a love for the past.

If only he were born then..

Some time later,

There was a meeting.

Lurker was inside of his more eerie, shadow form and was very unhappy. There were more members of this band of misfits, and they surrounded him as he spoke.

"We've gone on many trips now to the human side and they haven't gotten the message. I've been thinking for some time now, and I think we should strike them head on."

This sent a chill through most of their spines.

"B-But their base is so far!" A woman, appearing to be very humanlike, exclaimed in terror.

"We have a way to get there very fast. Drake has left to contact the dragons and hitch us a ride with one of their larger inhabitants."

The woman changed her form into that of a werewolf. Admittedly, it gave Illusion a bit of anxiety at first sight. "We're still small! We won't stand a chance!!"

Lurker's eyes grew to an angered expression. "You think this is the only group of monsters behind this?! I

wouldn't have announced something of this magnitude if we had no backup. This is calling upon every single monster of this planet to one place. We're all banning together to strike them at the source."

The lycanthrope lowered her ears and cowered.

"Meet me outside and wait."

Everyone obeyed. They stepped outside and waited until the ground shook under their feet and a large, Eastern dragon waved in the wind above them.

Emerald scaled, mane as dark as crimson and golden fangs, it shimmered in the light of the sun and was too beautiful to imagine humans would want to destroy it.

It landed on its talons and knelt down for the entire group to take safety in its back mane, soft as silk. It was the only comfort that would meet them today.

At first, Illusion got nauseous from the sensation and the heights, but it wasn't so bad as time went on. And he quite liked the large scaled creatures.

They arrived in a large city covered in skyscrapers and tall buildings. Some were already destroyed. In the middle? A red one with many lights inside. There was already screaming coming from below at the sight of a large monster heading their way.

The dragon inhaled, and rocketed a large blue streak of fire down onto them as a warning sign that this was it. This was Armageddon.

Swooping down it destroyed buildings with its feet, and kicked them into nothing as it flailed its body into other buildings, causing mass destruction.

"Hold on everyone..!" Lurker called. "This is a rocky ride! But we're setting an example!"

Humans were already shooting guns and various other projectiles at the creature, but no element pierced its scales.

Until someone in the large red building prepared a bomb. Firing it in the direction of the dragon.

No dragon is a fool. They age slower than any other monster that isn't immortal. Sadly, a dragon is not immortal. And that would be proven soon. Before impact, the dragon swooped down and safely delivered the monsters onto a safe hiding place between two fallen buildings. Flying back up and preparing for the impact.

It blew it to bits upon the ground and people below, the rest falling down and being a ruined corpse.

The monster group held back their stomachs to the sight. No amount of death they had seen before compared to the amount of gore left of the dragon.

But that wouldn't be the last of the dragons entering here now. In the skies, many flying monsters such as

dragons and griffins flew in for the rebellion. Some were chased by planes and helicopters, to be expected, but those were not there without a fight from said creatures. Planes were being tackled by the beasts and torn to shreds in the air or being melted into nothing. Screams came from the ground as lizard people

were attacking humans in the streets with spears and bats. The death of one of their eldest unleashed a great hell onto the community and started the war further.

"What do we do now?" One of the monsters asked in the group, as they had landed here with very little of a plan for the event. They didn't know they would be gunned down.

"We uhh... Survive." Lurker stated. "We do our best to survive the war."

"You kicked us out here without a backup plan?!" Illusion was in shock. He ran off into the alleys on his own and attempted to do just that; Survive.

He could see other species storming the city now. There were everything from orcs to elves, species resembling animals, ghouls and ghosts.. Everything. It was all out war now and he had no plans of what to do.

He was simply trapped in the war and could only hope for the best.

He climbed up a building using his feline claws and watched from above. Smoke was already reaching the air above, gunshots were audible, and bolts of lightning from elemental weapons came from random spots below. Eventually, the large red building from afar began firing other projectiles out in a poor attempt to clear the streets, but it just made things worse.

In fact... One was coming scarily close to him.

He miscalculated just how much it was. Before he was hit by a piece of debris and knocked backwards. The smell of his hair being burned on the ends by the piece of stone lit ablaze entering his nostrils as things went dark again.

It became the smell of roses and silk.

He was being carried home on a comforting back. It was Leo again. They were both much smaller now..

His hair was also much longer back then.. It was lighter too. A yellow blonde unseen by the horrors of the world, but he had already seen a few of them.

"Leo...? What are you thinking about?" He asked, his voice higher pitched as well..

"I've been thinking about my family mostly." Leo sounded a little grim with this. "My mom is leaving. I don't

know where though, she just said it was serious."

"Oh.."

Illusion was quiet now.

"If it helps, one day I'll be strong enough to replace them both!" Illusion perked up. "And you won't have to

be the one to carry my weight anymore! I swear!"

Leo just chuckled at him, before the quiet came back.

"I really hate that you have to save me all the time."

With that, Leo sat him down and knelt in front of him.

"You take that back. I would never feel upset having your back, you got that? I'll have your back no matter

what I have to do for you. Even if we don't always agree on things, I've got your back."

Illusion looked down a little. "I always have yours emotionally, but I just can't agree with everything I hear

all the time. And sometimes, things are too scary for me. I just want things to be... Different."

The silent moments were more of silent moments of understanding now, as they just sat on the trail home

and silently understood.

"Just... Don't be so hard on yourself all the time. You're a manly little guy! You look like... A young warrior! Already!" Leo encouraged him.

"E-Even with my hair long?" Illusion grabbed up his own hair.

"Are you kidding? A lot of warriors let their hair grow. That's why I thought of that. And mine is too... That's partly why I keep it this way. It makes us look tough,"

Illusion felt a little euphoric from this. "I-I know when I was little, I really wanted to be a boy.. And with the weird genetic stuff people have now, they could do that more than hormones and old surgeries.." This was the far future after all. This was the world where you had machines that could show you your dreams, and microchips to extend your lifespan, of course transitioning would be advanced too. You could do nearly anything you wanted with your body now.

"I'm glad you're comfortable with who you are now.." Leo was much like him, but he didn't exactly want much of himself changed like Illusion.

"I just always worry if I'm masculine enough," Despite having the junk for it now, he still wanted to be the perfect man..

"You're silly.. You worry about every single thing." Leo patted him on the head. "Just because I found it in me to fight doesn't mean you're less for not fighting the same way. If anything, you're emotionally strong for holding yourself together no matter what! I'm not so... Emotionally okay compared to you.."

That was true... He didn't seem like it, but when the two were alone Leo needed him most.

"But, in the end, I swear I'll have your back forever."

Illusion blinked. He felt a presence above him.

He saw..

"Leo..?"

He took his mask off, to show who he was to him.

"Illusion?!" Leo was reasonably in shock. "What the hell? Where have you been?!"

Illusion looked down. "I've... Befriended the monsters."

He expected the worst from him, but Leo was quiet. He seemed to be lost in thought for a moment.

"I uh... I figured. I figured you would, some day. And as much as I wouldn't have sided with this myself, for you I will follow this path."

Illusion was slightly surprised by this but... He knew he couldn't stop protecting him. Even if this was against his morals.

"Thank you.. Where's my parents?"

Leo looked at the large tower in the distance. "Ever since you've been gone, they've been on edge. And it looks like their ideas were true. This is a war."

The two climbed through the rubble of the city, through the streets and into a safe place. They headed to

a subway station, now abandoned as everyone else was in the streets fighting for their lives.

They simply sat in the place and talked about everything Illusion had experienced. It wasn't hard for Leo to understand and his views to become shaky.

"You're... Not going to need my help defending yourself anymore." Leo looked a little down. "I'm proud, I'm just going to miss it now."

Illusion shook his head. "I think right now we could use each other's strength."

Leo thought about it. They could help each other survive now, with his brute strength and Illusion's newfound magic, they could perhaps survive this and lead the world to a better place. "What... What are we going to do now? We can't stay here forever.."

Illusion pondered..

"Do you think we could sneak into the HQ of these people? We could take it over and announce to them why this needs to end."

It was intimidating, but...

"Yeah... You have a whole species to back you, and me of all people. I think we can do this."

There was a small pause..

"Do we have to be in a hurry?" Illusion asked. "It's been so long... I've worried about you more than anything."

It couldn't hurt for them to just wait things out here for just a little while.

They traveled the streets soon after, stepping over the bodies along the way uncomfortably. By this time, a lot of the city had been destroyed and people of all kinds were gone.

Even the most innocent..

It was painful for Illusion, to see the younger people be demolished by the damage. Young children.

But, he coped with the idea that these children were once being trained to hate. He tried hard to remind himself that these people young and old were, deep down, judging innocent creatures of things they had no guilt of.

But... Was it really their fault?

Children weren't born to hate.

His morals were having a horrible time as he thought about it. It was easier to ignore his feelings inevitably and move on.

They reached a street covered in fire. Seeing as there were remains of elves here, he stopped Leo from walking.

"Hold up. These aren't regular flames. The elves use flames from some sort of hell that consumes souls once stepped into."

Leo raised a brow to this. "You really believe in that?"

Illusion paused. He sort of... Believed it instinctively for some reason and didn't consider that it could just be legend and superstition gone feral. Still, he nodded. "I've seen things most men couldn't believe now, I can't deny anything."

Leo listened regardless, and avoided the flames as he walked as best he could. Carrying on for the destination.

The tower was odd on the inside. There were glass walls with red railing, and in the middle of the open rooms there was a single elevator. A panel in the front told them the rooms to go to.

Up, down, and double down. Double down needed a key card.

"What the hell is the double down?" Leo raised his brow to it.

"A basement? Or... with these people, probably something horrible."

They looked at each other.

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking?" Illusion proposed.

"If these people are controlling this tower, they wouldn't be somewhere too obvious. They're hiding the real shit down below. We need down there."

They nodded to one another and chose up first. Anyone with a key card would be controlling the big guns.

They needed to take them out.

They went all the way to the roof, where an antenna was located, and the weapons. Where two goons were. They were shocked that some young kids were suddenly there, and even more shocked that they were suddenly being attacked by said kids. It was going smoothly, until one knocked Illusion in the back of the head with one of the machine guns that were up there.

He fell to his knees in pain, as Leo called out to him.

Leo kicked the man he was currently attacking to the ground below. "Fucking... I'm coming, hold on!" He rushed over, but he was too late.

Illusion was falling from the highest point of the city.

Leo was panicked, angry, and so many emotions he had only felt when Illusion was far away from him. He worked so hard to become strong. To fight for his family, and make them proud no matter how hard that seemed to be. But he felt so helpless when Illusion wasn't here for him.

They completed one another, and when that second piece was gone...

He snapped. His head ached, his skin was crumbling. All he could see was a blur.

His body was changing. His fingers were molding together, they were hooves.

He was the very thing he had hunted for, all along.

On all fours, he rammed his antlers into the one that knocked his best friend, and childhood crush off the building. And he jumped, eyes locked onto the boy. He reached his hooved legs out and hoped he would fall just a little faster. Get just a little momentum and grasp the poor boy before he was reduced to nothing.

Once he grabbed him, however... He was covered in a silky thread. And the world around them began to

fade away, as if they were fainting.

When they awoke again, Leo was human. And they seemed to be floating in a white void.

In front of them was a solid white, glowing form. A white cat, with spider legs and a tail with what seemed like yellow halo rings around it.

"You're awake," it spoke. "I've been waiting. You're safe, there's some things we need to talk about..." Illusion was... Confused. Speechless. There were apparently things he didn't know about his long time friend.

"Your friend has not lied to you." The creature spoke. "He simply doesn't know what he truly is. For he does not know how to control himself."

By clicking one of its feet, Leo felt the pain again. He grasped his head as his eyes leaked a strange fluid and antlers sprouted from his head.

"Your friend is an ancient spirit, revered as a god of monsters. Every few centuries, the god of death and nature will find a new body to be reincarnated into and bless it with its power." The

creature explained. "The cost of this? He will forget. He will never remember the years he lived before. The world he lived in and passed by. The memories will leave, but the form will live on forever." The being looked at Illusion again. "You, however, have some hidden traits to awaken to. You have done nothing but be a kind soul. You've tried to free us of our burden and mistreatment. For that, I will bless you. As a demigod myself, I will give you the key." Before them lay the mask which Illusion had worn for so long during his adventure.

Swiftly broken in two but the creature's leg.

"You no longer need this. As I am blessing you with something far greater."

It stretched out a gemstone on a thread necklace.

"As Dhar'seetha, the child of the stars and the weaver of wishes, I grant you a wish many have dreamt of.

The ability to see through dimensions and take the form of them. Become anyone you've ever been before, from countless timelines and lives."

Illusion took it. Staring into the gemstone.

"We've all lived many lives." Dhar'seetha explained. "Be it in timelines, or other worlds where you were born from a rat to a boar. You can become anything, with the memories and emotions included."

He put it around his neck, as it glowed softly.

"My last message to you is a warning. Once you go to the basement, you will see sights you'll wish you hadn't. Stay on your feet, and free every monster you see that has been taken by the humans. Someone is there below that needs you the most. Take this with you.."

The god handed them the key card they needed. And before them, the white faded. They were safely in the lower room again.

They were quiet for a moment, as the revelations made just now had them tense. They learnt so much just now, including about themselves.

"Do you... Have lapses of memory when that happens?" He wondered how he didn't remember seeing him the first time.

Leo nodded. "It's always when I get overly emotional... Like my insides boil, and all the sudden my vision is blurry and... I black out and become that."

Illusion smiled a little. "I already saw you in the forest some time ago.. And asked you where you were. I killed a few guys that were hunting you and saved your life."

He blinked in shock for a moment. "You... Saved my life this time.."

Illusion flexed his own muscles to show his strength. "See? I can fight too. I just... Knew who the real bad guys were all along I guess?"

Leo giggled at him. "Guess so... Let's get this over with.."

Illusion slid the key card, and clicked the ominous button.

Deep under the ground lay dozens of cages. Each having old, beaten and bruised monsters that glared at them whilst they walked through the hall.

"Jesus.." Illusion quietly whispered. "We have to get these guys on our side."

But there was no key for them to find. And a key card definitely wouldn't open any doors here.

Grasping the jewel in his hand, Illusion tested out the newfound abilities he had found. He became a large, red dragon simply by thinking of becoming strong. And began kicking doors off their hinges. The monsters quickly gathered together and took turns exiting through the elevator. Thankfully, going up after coming down was not required of the card apparently. The security of this place quite frankly sucked. Probably because of its age, as this place had been here for quite some time.

In the back was one last cage.

They approached it together, and spotted something shocking.

What appeared to be a unicorn. Once thought extinct, was alive and sentient. But horribly beaten and lashed.

"Hello..?" Illusion greeted the creature.

She looked up at him, looking depressed. "A dragon, and a human..?" She weakly asked.

"Neither of us are entirely human." Illusion explained.

Leo nodded. "Though I didn't know about that until recently... I am apparently not human."

Illusion busted the cage open. "Come on. This is it. We're going to war and everyone needs out right now."

The unicorn struggled to get up to her feet. She limped out of the bars and hung her head low.

"Our kind got along often..." The unicorn told Illusion. Still believing him to be a dragon.

"Our current king is apparently a mixture of our species, right?" Illusion asked her.

"I wouldn't know... I've been here for several years." The unicorn sadly said. "We age very slowly, we and the dragons. But we are nowhere near immortal. I've nearly died several times."

The two were quiet. It was the most depressing sight either of them had seen. A serene and beautiful creature like this, being made into a depressed and beaten figure.

They went up the elevator with her, and to the roof again. To see the state that the city was in once more.

The unicorn and the two young men looked out onto the world. Skies filled with flying beasts going to war.

The ground... Destroyed.

Suddenly, the aforementioned king came flying with several other monsters. Including Devi, our guide from

the beginning. The king wore a cloak over himself, tied down to his body excluding the wings.

And the eyes glared through holes. One horn peeked from the top as well.

"Children. We have gathered onto the fields outside of the mountains. We are in all out war." His deep voice rattled.

He then noticed... The unicorn.

His insides ached. As he remembered...

His past family.

"Your grace." He greeted her. "I thought... Our species. The unicorns. I thought they had all since died."

The unicorn looked up to the creature king. "You are partly a unicorn... That horn.." She approached him, legs still nearly giving out.

"I'm so sorry.. They've since killed us all. I'm the only one left but the children like you. The hybrid children..."

The king came closer to her, and let her lean her poor body against him without falling.

"You need never to apologize." He stated. "We will show them their sins. They will be punished until they know the consequences."

Leo looked down. "I'm sorry... I wish I would have known this was how you-... No. How we had been treated. I didn't know I was one of you until now and I-... All of this.." It nearly brought him to tears.

Illusion placed a scaly arm around him.

"Child, you would have been a part of the family the moment you joined our side. But knowing you are one of us genetically or spiritually is still rewarding." The king comforted him with his words. "Illusion. Friend is upon one of the mountains outside of this area. Some of us will be setting up a camp up there for those who do not wish to fight in the war on the front lines. I suggest you take up a spot there for your safety along with your ally. I will take this unicorn to safety."

Devi perched on his shoulder. "I am helping!" They looked at each other for a moment.

"You kidding? We aren't backing down for a second. We're fighting for our rights here." Leo stated. He thought of the moment he felt scared that Illusion was going to fall to his death, and centered his emotions on those past ones. Morphing himself into the deer god once again.

"I want to confront my family and all of the master hunters with the knowledge I have now. I want them to pay for what they've done." Illusion hissed.

The king nodded. "You are welcome to it. But be careful, they are not backing down lightly."

Illusion grew in size, lifting Leo's deer body onto his back and flying into the battlefield with the rest of the f

lying creatures doing the same. They all swarmed above the battlefield and shot fire, ice, lightning, everything they could onto the warriors below. Leo leaped from Illusion's back, landing onto larger monsters that

helped him safely be on the ground. Where he impaled many humans on his antlers and bucked them with his hooves.

Illusion ducked down to kick some as well, biting out their throats. And fighting in every way he could possibly do so.

Many monsters were losing their lives as well, but they were fighting with as much spirit as they could. Even as the flames of magical swords burnt them to the bone, they didn't give up.

Eventually, they were stopped when a yell came from the human's side of the field.

Marching into the field was a group of hunters, leading multiple carriages. The biggest was well decorated, and exiting it came an elderly man with a crimson robe.

"My name is Edward. Edward Von Dhelis. I am the current king of humanity as a whole, and ruler of every government of man. As far as they're concerned, I am the god of man."

Many flying monsters tried to shoot their flames and otherwise down to him, but a forcefield protected him, as expected.

"I am willing to make a deal with you that if you behave, all monsters may live underground for the rest of eternity safely."

Many monsters hissed and roared in resistance to this.

"We are people too!"

"We have feelings and thoughts as you!!"

"You can't keep us down, not without a fight! You well dressed pecker!"

"We will turn you into meat and dust!"

And many more cries came from them.

"Hmph... So be it." He turned to his more advanced hunters. "Take them out."

Now the humans were magically levitating in the air to fight and kill the flying monsters, more advanced magic was being used on them more than ever before and killing them in floods. They were being torn down quicker and more brutal than before, and Illusion began to feel intimidated.

Leo approached him. "They're not doing us in just yet." He somehow spoke telepathically.

"Stand by me.

Until we can't stand anymore. I'll be your partner until the grave if you let me be."

Illusion nodded.

They continued to fight. Friend left the camp it had created with the other monsters to slice humans in two with its tail blades. Other leaders of monster groups joined it.

They were dwindling. But they were brave, and not backing down.

A roar suddenly broke from the heavens, the ground began to shake. Gigantic worms broke from the ground as the sky opened and they welcomed their gods.

Beautiful beasts, with many eyes and wings. They looked like the biblical angels.

This was it. It was just like the bibles Illusion had read. These were the angels. Cloaked in fire amongst their wings. And one incomprehensible one in the middle that was so mind shattering, their shape could barely be made out amongst them.

And the king... No longer concealed, and carrying the beautiful unicorn on his back, appeared.

The horn of a unicorn, many eyes on its face, a spider mouth, and a gargoyle-like body greeted them finally. Landing on feet that also resembled a spider, the huge beast approached.

"A king of humans cannot defeat a king blessed by the gods. If you want to suffer the roaring, step forward."

Edward saluted his fellow men, and motioned his army forward. Even in the face of gods, he refused to listen to their warning.

Suddenly, a high pitched roaring scream came from the chiefs of the monster colonies, and the king himself even louder. The celestial beings above joined with a call that sounded almost like a melody, yet burned the ears at the same time..

Humans fell to the ground in masses. Their ears bleeding, their mouths foaming, until they were on the ground dead.

Edward now looked intimidated, he didn't have many men left, only some that appeared to be civilians forced to fight in a war they didn't even properly ask to. And... What looked like..

Illusion's parents.

Illusion flew up to the king, and whispered this note into his ear. Who nodded, and offered him to also sit upon his back.

Illusion completely removed his disguise, leaving his parents speechless. Their jaws dropped.

"Mother, father... I know you surely saw this coming." Illusion called to them. "But the side you are on... Is a losing one."

His father spoke up. "What the fuck are you doing, Illusion?! What has happened to you? How... How do you turn into that.. Thing?" He spoke with his hands, motioning to the mess he had just seen.

"I've been with them long enough to know some tricks." He paused.. "I'm not the only one that knows tricks, apparently. How about we present to you, and the rest of these innocent civilians, the truth?"

With that, Illusion led the unicorn forward. Showing the humans the beautiful creature.

"Your leaders threatened the life of this beautiful creature. The same creature many mothers have hanging up on their shelves as figurines. These creatures you thought weren't real and were ornaments? They're one of the monsters you've been slaughtering. And the master hunters? They always knew. I saw my dad's stash of papers. I saw they knew where the same building that hid this was located."

The civilians looked at one another, they were in disbelief.

"H-He lies!" The human king stuttered. "That.. Cannot be! He's a lying heathen that betrayed us!"

The unicorn looked down. "Your kind took me into labs to test on me. You strapped us to beds and sliced off our horns, you took our limbs and our organs. You wondered if we were made of glitter and spice. You laughed as you did it. You killed every one of us and thought it was a sort."

The king seemed even more uncomfortable.

"The only way we survived was by interspecies relationships. We mated with other monsters until there were hybrids of every kind, just to make sure our species never died. But the unicorn... We're no more. I am the last."

"This.... Cannot be true!" Illusion's father piped up. "The king has known we master hunters for ages and showed us how barbaric they are...." He spat at the ground "Their... 'Race' is. They do so many things that are dark and disturbing. They use magic for fun without being under surveillance. They believe these nasty fuckers are gods! They cross breed with each other!"

The spider demigod from before piped up. "Oh, you're one to talk. You want to know something fun?" They pointed down at the two. "Both of them have had affairs with monsters when they were younger. She with

an orc, he with a male elf. It's how he knows about our deity worship. And they always knew about the human's deeds. They kept records."

Illusion was stunned by his parents' histories, but added, "I found the folders of experiment information. I don't remember if there were unicorns in them, but I can confirm there was... Evil things done to your kind."

His parents were arguing now with one another, too distracted with the fact they were with monsters in the past to care that their son had seen their shady knowledge. It was plenty for the civilians to turn on them, though. They started an uproar, yelling obscene things at the human king and causing him to back down. The other master hunters and lower ranks seemed to not care about him as much and were just standing there staring at him.

Surely there was a way to kill him for good while he was this nervous and his power unsteady. Illusion clutched the gemstone he was given, that let him take shape as other versions of himself from other realities and lives. He closed his eyes, searching for anything strong enough for him to use. Whilst the monster king and unicorn continued to declare Edward's sins.

Suddenly, all he saw was white.

A small voice called to him. "Illusion, you have unknowingly unlocked something special."

Dhar'seetha call

ed out. "This is a veil between worlds, this is reality's curtain. You will not always be able to view this, but sometimes you will be lucky enough to."

Dhar'seetha suddenly appeared and crawled along the glowing void's wall.

"You want to unlock your full potential?" They asked. "We all have beginnings. Many of us have greater beginnings than we think. Reach out, Illusion, and find your first life. The origins of your very soul. And only

then, will you truly have the power you seek."

Illusion reached his hand outwards for something. Anything.

And the void went dark.

"I call upon the vapor." A huge voice spoke. "I call upon stone and vapor. Come to me."

Particles swirled in the darkness, and with a flash, the universe as they knew it was born.

"Not many get given the blessing I have been." The voice said. "The god of all gods giving me the blessing to have my own universe. My own world.. I will use it wisely."

With a wave of its hand, stars were born. "You will decorate the skies for our children at night." It lovingly

whispered. "And there will be many worlds! With all kinds of life on them. And all of them will live their own chaotic little lives of joy and sorrow."

The wishes of this god came true one by one.

"There will be many races, and many species. All in their own places. You all serve your own purposes, just like I was made to. We aren't very different at all."

Animals were made. But not monsters or humans yet.

"I cannot rule alone." The god said, "I need allies of my own, just like I was. My children."

Suddenly, golden spirits were born. With many wings, and many eyes. Some wheels, some triangles, many shapes and sizes of creatures with features some could never comprehend.

One of them... He was seeing them from their point of view.

"You are angels. I was once one of you." The god explained. "But I was given a blessing from our true lord. I was given the blessing of one universe, the gift to make somewhere all of my own. It's something very few can have. One day, I will let one of you have your own world." Everything went black again. No voice, no universe. It was as if his many eyes closed for some time. And the god's voice spoke again.

"Things were supposed to be so happy.." They sounded so sad. "But peace is not always an option. Everything goes bad one day. A traitor, not much different from Lucifer himself appeared. And my children... I lost them all." Screams. So many screams. He could hear them all suddenly. They rang out from everywhere. "You all fell... It wasn't even because you turned on me, it was a horrible mistake. I panicked, and because I didn't know which was the evil one that kept hurting the other children, I sentenced you all to live as mortals on your individual worlds. And some... Some were not so lucky as to stay pure either. You sinned,

you made many mistakes. And I ached for all of you."

He opened his eyes again to see a bigger version of himself. A giant angel, which played the role of god.

"Life was so beautiful though, you were all in harmony for so long.. Every time you died, you went to another

her universe. You would come through many of them, and then back to mine again. You could be anything, and learn so many things."

Their eyes looked sad again.

"But then, the situation you're in arose. Wars between species... I made some monsters to serve as smaller 'gods' here, but even they couldn't stop it."

They looked... Ashamed?

"I am so sorry, child.. I didn't mean for this to happen.. I wanted a world with peace, but I ended up creating chaos. Please, take yours and many others' forms. And rid the world of the evil I could never do myself."

Suddenly, he was floating upwards. He was being ejected from the space the stone was in. And for lack of better wording, he woke up.

He was now back into the regular plane, and was a greater being in shape. A golden wheel, covered in red

d eyes, and levitating with him was several pairs of cream colored wings.

The human king, Edward, stared in fear with his fellow men. They somehow felt this being's shape was...

Familiar?

A glowing sphere formed in the middle of Illusion's body, and rested there for some time, until it became a

beam of light striking the shield around the king. It was obliterated soon after, and the king didn't even have a chance to scream in agony before he was dust in the wind.

He just blinked after. It didn't bother him in the slightest to have done this. He stared as the other humans seemed to not know what to do or say, they were utterly shocked. They felt betrayed by him for sure, but they didn't exactly want him to die either. It was necessary though, they just didn't know that this man before them was a great evil more than even they had seen now.

Monsters and humans soon disbanded. It took some time for them to process what had happened, but it was over now. The humans didn't know who to raise as their new king, but they really questioned if they even needed one to begin with. Maybe they could rebuild society and have presidents again, or maybe they could say goodbye to rulers entirely and instead find something new to keep their little society together. They weren't so sure, but they would find something to bring themselves together again. Monsters went home to their respective places. But soon, they would prepare to make big changes.

Several years later..

A large building stood just on the outskirts of town. It was a church, or so it seemed. It also housed a beautiful garden, and a section in the back that was essentially a home.

Out of the home came Illusion, now much more aged than before. He was a mature and grown man now, and so was his partner. Leo was much taller now, and more worn from many fights with criminals.

Not everyone had accepted this new life.

"Alright dear, I'll be heading to my own job while you go out on the town." Leo pulled his hair back. "Someone's gotta keep the people safe. I just wish more people decided to work on the new hunters force."

Illusion nodded to him. "I think everything just left a bad taste in a lot of people's mouths. They can't look at the hunters without remembering slaughter, but I understand that we needed something to keep people safe on the streets. It's ironic that most everyone we catch doing harmful acts are confused and frustrated humans."

Leo chuckled. "I guess in the end, they will always be the ones causing the most trouble."

He left a small kiss to Illusion before leaving. They had no leaders anymore, but they did have an elite force of good people and monsters to keep things together. Monsters were the ones hunting now, too. And they sought to keep the evil at bay.

Illusion went out on the town, and was looking to buy supplies. He owned this church structure, and he sought to teach all people about the history of spirituality on this planet, and the true origins of how their existence began. He never wanted anyone to forget where they came from anymore. It was such a surreal sight, seeing monsters drive cars down roads and run businesses. Humans using magic in their everyday lives, and skies being covered in beautiful flying creatures. It seemed humans used

some of said creatures to replace planes and other flying devices. An eco-friendly alternative? And it was a well paying job for said beasts. Even those creatures needed the funds in the end, they had their own giant homes and land to return to.

Into the stores he went, where workers were also both human and nonhuman. It was so normalized now, and it was comforting to see. Getting his goods, he returned home soon after. On his way he met friends old and new. The unicorn had actually become great friends with Drake somehow, and the two were out with the rest of the small army Illusion once partnered with.

They saw each other regularly, and sometimes they visited the church.

The one thing Illusion did not see often were his parents.

They were reasonably strained. But he had heard they were now communicating with each other better and were even in a stable open relationship with several monsters.

It was... Quite the shock to hear. Illusion had no idea why they never interacted now that they had welcomed monsters into their lives, other than outting their conspiracy of course, but... Why not come see your child once you finally changed for the better?

He tried not to think too much about it. He had his own family to worry about.

The day went on as normal, as he preached to the many people, monsters and otherwise that came in. Telling stories he had remembered of their prior existences and educating them as to what their past life had been. And when they left, a familiar face or two came in through the door.

The monster king and the small Devi flew in, holding a small box.

"Hello, sir! It has been some time." Illusion greeted him. "Yes, we come with an offering to you. A proposal that might help your little temple here." He stood in front of Illusion.. And opened the box.

Many jewels that resembled the one that he used to change into past lives and other universe counterparts sat in the box, sparkling.

"How did you get this..?" Illusion asked.

"The odd small god that appeared to us explained that others of this world should become in touch with their true selves." The king explained. "Since you preach to the world the truth of their origins, I thought it would be best that we start giving them the keys to their truth."

Illusion took the box. "Those who didn't believe, will do so now.."

The king nodded. "I wish you luck on freeing all of their mortal binds."

Illusion smiled at the beast, "Thank you."

They bowed politely, before leaving. Illusion placed the box onto the old altar, and went back into the house portion of their building.

From then onwards, every person that came to the church would be blessed with a stone that showed the

m their every life. Be it past, or that of another timeline, their existence was shown to them.

Everyone of the world knew then that in reality, no human was truly always human. Every human that did not believe in

Equality of species were made to see this truth, and learn they were the very thing they hated.

The world was equal, regardless of what they were. They were all flesh and blood. They were all made of stardust and ethereal light. They had become lost in their mortal lives, but they were angels. They were never truly human or monsters at all, on the inside.

Even Illusion's family, not just the parents but the living bloodline, came to the church to inevitably come to the truth. They were never the thing they were standing so hard to protect. They were not human inside.

On the soft autumn dusk after several years, humans and monsters gathered all over the world. All at once, they stripped themselves of their mortal forms. Blazing bodies of light and eyes all over, lighting up the air around them.

They hummed a soft vibrating sound as they flapped their many wings, looking like stars lifting off of the ground, and slowly took to the skies.

Everyone has shed their prior issues with each other.

Species, familial, everything didn't matter.

Their current life no longer mattered. They floated into the skies, passing beyond the barriers.

They made it to the outside. The outer space.

They now, truly, became one with the stars.

Floating endlessly, the trillions upon trillions of angel folk drifted among their many cousins.

It felt like ages until they met with the larger one of their kind, but eventually, they found it.

Floating as if it

were the sun. The wings seemed to go on for miles and curled around them all.

It looked upon its children, with a sense of sorrow in its eyes.

"I'm so sorry." It sighed. "Your lives were ruined, I was never fit to rule over you. I did nothing but fail ever

my expectation. I was so much a disaster, I created demigods and smaller gods to fill roles I felt I could not fit anymore."

The smaller creatures gathered closer, essentially hugging up to it.

"You're no failure. You did your best."

"You took care of us the best you could. You gave us life."

"We lived life as all creatures should; With effort, and struggles, but with success as well!"

"We don't have regrets. And we have many more years to spend together. We have families to go home to."

"Do you still feel life is worth living?" It was something the sun god never imagined it would ask. But its children all seemed to agree. They wanted to live. They wanted to finish what they had started, even if the world around them still needed rebuilt from the ground up. They knew now that they had been misled by a rogue devil, a darker being. They knew that their life had been wrecked by an intruder, and that in the end the only thing they could do now was to finish what was started.

"Maybe my goals never truly failed." The god said. "Fall then, my little stars. And one day, I'll lead you to your last home again."

And so, after a moment of surrounding the large being more, they streaked across the sky once again. Falling to their earth as falling stars, they planted themselves to the ground and regained their mortal forms again.

Splitting, they went home. They swore to live their lives again.
They earned themselves another chance.

The churches continued. They spoke to their angelic parents on occasion and gave thanks for the lives they had been given.

The humans, the elves, the dragons, and many more... They lived in comfort, knowing that they were the same in the end.

And when they passed on, they would simply be angels again.

~ FIN